

*CHRYS ROMEO*



*THE SKATING RINK*

# The Skating Rink

**by Chrys Romeo**

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I met River at the skating rink.

It was just another day of the weekend and I was still in school that year.

I was going to the skating rink for the first time. I had never been to a skating rink before - ever. I could hardly recall a distant memory of putting on some white ice skates when I had been about five, but it was very blurry, lost in time and irrelevant... and I wasn't even sure I could keep my balance on ice, let alone skate confidently. However, trying something new was definitely attractive and thrilling. So I decided to do it.

That's why I was really enthusiastic about the idea of going to the skating rink. As we headed towards it, in the warm spring air, while the sun was gently softening its afternoon rays, I was wondering how I would learn the new skill, but I had no idea what to expect - of myself or the activity.

When I got there with my colleagues, I was very eager to get on with it. Even if I knew the other boys in the group might laugh at me for being awkward, I didn't mind. I was focused on the novelty of the action... waiting for my turn to get the skates at the reception desk, oblivious of the noise and chaotic chit-chat going on around me, from happy kids that couldn't wait any longer to rush to the rink, I grabbed my pair of skates like some valuable acquisition. They were a bit heavy and blue - intensely blue, which was somehow a reassuring color. Something like a guarantee of getting it done right. The sharp blades and rich nuance breathed achievement. I was more than glad to see they were so right on my feet; they seemed to have been meant especially for me.

Getting up with the heavy blue skates on was practically an easy task. Getting in the rink was a bit tricky though. I leaned on the wooden ledge and stepped ahead. The air was chilly and I could almost smell the ice. There weren't many kids on the ring. I watched the area for a moment. The scratched surface of artificial ice made the few kids that were sliding in chaotic directions seem bold experts. I decided to try my luck and I let go, dashing ahead. I felt

instantly taller – and I’m not very tall compared to other boys, which makes me lack advantage, when it comes to girls who choose other taller guys most of the time. But at that moment, as I was amazingly sliding on the ice, I felt taller, braver, stronger and definitely better than I had ever been. It was a great feeling... such a smooth movement. As heavy as the ice skates were on my feet, it was equally easier to advance in the ring. It was definitely way easier than walking. It was like riding a kite... like flying over the ground. I felt powerful and confident. I started to enjoy crossing the length of the oval skating zone, adjusting the direction to turn... as I got more and more confident, I increased my speed... and then, I saw her, very closely, glancing at me with a smile – something about that smile was instantly appealing. There was a certain trust and admiration in her eyes that made me feel appreciated even if I didn’t know why... and it made me want to show off a little, to prove that I was worth it.

As her image went by me in a flash, that second was enough for my thoughts to get caught in the moment: I turned and suddenly, something unexpected occurred: I didn’t notice that the front rim of the skates was shaped like a saw, probably to help with artistic ballet schemes, when necessary. But it worked like an abrupt brake. Making a quick move to speed up, the tip of the skate got stuck in the ice, so I tripped over and rolled down in less than a flash of a second. Everything seemed upside down. The ice became the ceiling and the noise around disappeared. I rolled back over and recovered my view of the entire zone. At that moment, I felt a bit dizzy and cold. And then I noticed her again: standing there, next to me.

“Are you okay? Do you need any help?” she asked.

She seemed slightly concerned and serious, as she was glancing at me. Brown dark eyes, like silent lakes, deep oceans were staring beyond the carefully arranged locks of long hair. I could feel the cold frozen ice beneath my jeans and the first image that came to my mind was a cup of hot chocolate. Then I realized a girl was looking at me as I was down on the skating rink surface. *How embarrassing*, I thought and I frowned a little.

„Thanks. I’m fine”, I mumbled and got up shaking off the snowy dust I had gathered on my clothes while tumbling down.

She smiled.

„I’m also new at this, but if you want to keep your balance you have to avoid gaining too much speed. Just take it one step at a time. No complicated figures. Watch!”

And she went ahead, sliding gently on the ice, her arms stretched like wings to the sides, following an invisible line. I went after her, quickly adjusting my speed to catch up with her. She reached the end of the skating rink and hit the wooden ledge, leaning on it joyfully.

„I can do this, but I’m not going to make any risky moves”, she said a bit amused.

„So I noticed”.

I smiled. Her style of skating was calm and steady, unlike mine... I wanted speed and adrenaline. I wanted to prove myself... to myself. And yet, leaning on the wooden ledge, next to her, I was beginning to forget the reason why I wanted to get good at skating. It suddenly seemed more important to stand by her side and simply enjoy the company of that unexpected girl. I noticed she was a bit taller than me but I didn’t let that ruin my mood. *Great*, I thought. *Another teen girl that won’t give me the time of day*. But I cast the thought aside. It didn’t seem to matter anymore, in the ring, who was what. And not even the noisy kids, falling one on top of the other in laughter, didn’t get my attention anymore. I felt good just being there. She was looking around, her cheeks rosy with enthusiasm. We were getting warmer from the fast motion. Something seemed just right for me, being there with her.

”What’s your name anyway?” I asked her.

”I’m River. My name is River Flow.”

”No way! Really? Like a river flow?”... I said amazed, in disbelief.

„Don’t make fun of me.”

“I won’t... you have a really nice name. What shall I call you? River or Flow?”

“Whatever you prefer. What about you?” she turned to look at me attentively.

For some reason, her eyes had a deep intensity, like a determination that went beyond my power to resist her.

„My name is Will.”

„Ok Will. Let’s see if we can get this skating thing right.”

„I’ll race you!” I challenged her and we started toward the other end of the oval arena.

I was careful not to fall down anymore. For some reason, even if I wasn’t an expert at skating, I could get more speed than she would, with her calm, cautious sliding... so I got ahead of her.

„I win!” I said joyfully, when I hit the wooden ledge that was the finish line.

„Not fair! You skate too fast...” she protested, but she smiled, breathing deeply. „Do you want to get to the other side?”

When she said *the other side*, I thought it meant the end of the skating rink.

„Yeah, sure”, I said.

„Let’s go together”.

I was bewildered when I saw her extending a hand to me. The palm was covered in a woolen, fingerless glove. I took her hand and my head went blank for a few seconds, while my heart was racing with unexpected emotion. We started skating together. I could feel the soft woolen texture of the glove on my skin, but also the firm grip of her fingers, holding my hand in a delicate yet steady touch. I realized she was the first girl I was skating with... and holding hands. We had met for only a few minutes, and yet she had already given me so much more than my recent unsuccessful attempts of girlfriends at school. Without many words and without any doubts, she had taken in a minute the courage to be more than the long list of virtual acquaintances, brief encounters in the hallways, pointless conversations and refused connections that I had experienced before. She was real... and she was holding my hand... and we were skating together. I couldn’t believe it.

After a while, she let go of my hand as we arrived on the other side. I felt an unexplained shade of sorrow, letting her go. Looking around, the skating rink was suddenly a different landscape. It was flooded by a translucent light in many colors and the ice seemed grey and sandy, like the surface of the moon. The edges of the skating rink were disappearing in thin clouds of swirling mist.

„What is this? The twilight zone?“ I asked her.

There wasn't anyone on the skating rink anymore: just us. And I could see the sunlight appearing from the melting ceiling, the top of a mountain, green branches, birds flying over our heads, the clear blue sky... I looked at my feet and saw grass: patches of fluffy grass.

„Is this an illusion?“ I asked her again, because she was silent.

She didn't appear surprised by anything that was around us.

„It's not an illusion. It's a skating rink“.

And she smiled. I looked at her, forgetting about the meaning of what she had said. The pure innocence of her smile was making me surrender my mind to a state of amazed contemplation. It was as if I was beginning to notice how beautiful she was – not a blinding sparkling beauty, but a deeper, a more overwhelming irresistible kind that glowed from inside out. Like a rising tidal wave, an undeniable truth.

„Is this what you were hoping for?“ she asked, watching me with observant eyes.

„What do you mean?“

„I mean when you came here this afternoon. Did you think you would find so much on this skating rink?“

„I was really hoping to get good at skating. I certainly didn't expect to find you... or this...“

“Well, you should be careful what you hope for.”

Her mysterious words intrigued me.

“Why?“

“Because you might get it“, she smiled.

And she started sliding towards the other end, where I could see sunlight and blossomed trees and birds... She was sliding on ice, through fluffy patches of green grass... I watched her go, swaying smoothly and calmly like a determined ship, knowing and keeping direction. She seemed not in the least worried or surprised by the mirage around us. She might have witnessed it before. I was still wondering if it was a projection of the skating rink, like a hologram or something. I started to wonder if she was a part of it. But she felt very real. I could still remember the touch of her hand. It had been very real to me. I started to skate after her, moving quickly to catch up. If anything, she was the miracle... I didn't care if it was real or not. I could have been just as unreal myself... who knew and what did it matter? We were there together. And that was the only thing that meant anything to me, at that moment.

While we were going round and round the skating rink, the elusive images started to dissipate. The skating area returned to its usual aspect. I saw the noisy kids again, swarming around and showing off, falling on piles, one after the other. The people behind the glass screen stopped the music and asked everyone to leave because it was closing time.

I left with River Flow. My colleagues had already gone home, before I could notice.

It was a warm day and the sunset colors filled the streets with random traffic. The light had a nostalgic feeling to it, or maybe it was our own wish for the day to never end. I could sense that she was just as happy and just as lost in thoughts as I was. I knew, only by looking in her eyes: they were glistening with joy and a bit of regret because it was evening and the day was coming to an end. We stopped for a few seconds, waiting for traffic lights to change. As we glanced around, she sighed:

“It was a great day! I really enjoyed the skating rink!”

“Me too! We've got to come again soon.”

She looked at me. I wondered what she was thinking. The radiating smile on her face was hinting to a state of mind when you're feeling very much alive and you're ready for anything... to explore the world, to do something crazy...



that kind of exhilarating mood when you feel you're invincible and immeasurably happy about the wonderful unpredictability of life.

"Look", she said.

I stared at the parking space where I saw many motorbikes.

"I want one of those someday", she said.

"No! Really?? Me too!"

I couldn't believe we liked the same things. It was one of my dreams, to get a motorbike one day and run away to the end of the world. Across the black metal fence of the parking lot we could see the bay and the light spreading like orange shiny tin on water. I could almost ask if the ocean had always been there. It felt as if I was looking at it for the first time.

"Let's get one and run away", she said.

I knew she was just daydreaming about it, but I joined her game. I knew we weren't going to do that right then and there, but just the thought of it seemed as if the real thing was about to happen. It was more than enough – it seemed it was everything that would ever matter at that moment. Pretending we would do that for real made us believe we were seriously going to. I liked the idea of running away together. It implied total complicity in sharing our lives, our dream, getting lost in the adventure of a promising tomorrow. I could instantly see myself driving, while she would have her arms around me, holding me... like a perfect vacation picture. A total adventure...

I looked at the parked bikes. We were free to think about it... absolutely free to dream it could be real. Life was at our feet...

"Ok... which one should it be? Do we pick the black one? The black one, or the black and white?"

"The black and white. That's better."

"Agreed. And where shall we go?"

"We'll go to Africa first."

"Our parents won't know where to look for us."

"We'll send them postcards".

She leaned on the street light and stared dreamily down the alley. That was how I liked to remember her, in the years to come: hopefully staring ahead, towards some adventurous, free and unpredictable future where we would go round the world together, forever... It was something so enticing, like a never-ending story, like the light across the bay, swaying in the horizon... a perspective of infinite opportunities, an idea of an open road, a certainty that anything was possible as long as we were together... and it captured my soul entirely.

I wondered if I was already and possibly irreversibly in love with her. But I didn't ask myself too many questions: enjoying the evening was like the immensity of the universe before us... a moment like that when you only want to live, to feel, and not worry about anything... not even about another tomorrow.

We crossed the street.

The peaceful spring night was already falling around us.

"Will I see you again?" I asked her when we separated.

"Yes, Will... you will".

And I could feel her smiling through the darkness, her eyes glistening with sweetness, depth and something intense that was fixed on me, almost intimidating in its determination...

"Am I going to see you at the skating rink next time?"

"For sure", she answered.

"Well then... good night."

"Good night!"

And she disappeared.

I returned home beginning to feel anxious, worried and alone. I had to tell myself I would find her again the next day, just to discard the shroud of doubt that was clouding my mind.

However, I didn't find her the next day. And not the day after that either...

Ten years passed by and I didn't get to see her again. Not even once.

I couldn't forget about her. I kept going to the skating rink, weekend after weekend, year after year, but no sign of her anywhere... Nothing unusual like that happened again either: the surreal landscape, with fluffy grass on ice and a clear blue sky ceiling, sunshine and birds... it seemed to have been more like a dream. But I still believed it had been true. It must have been real. Nothing could erase the memory of the touch of her hand with woolen glove, holding mine as we were skating together. Sometimes, I remembered our plan to go around the world on a motorbike... I was so determined to meet her again, that I kept visiting the skating rink very often. So often, it became an addiction.

In time, I became a skating trainer... a trainer for kids, but still a good trainer. And the skating rink became my playing field: my territory. The memory of River Flow became a flashing brief moment from another life. Sometimes I wondered where she was in the world. Sometimes, I wondered if she actually *was* in the world. Sometimes I wondered if she was only in my mind – and I had invented her. She had been too good to be true, I often thought to myself. I must have created her - made her up from thoughts and wishes of my mind. Dreamed about her existence... Otherwise, how would I understand or justify her inexplicable absence?...

I got used to the idea that life did not give us more than a glimpse of what we wanted.

And then, one day, it happened. The moment I had been waiting for, along the course of ten years in a row – that sometimes felt like ten centuries – had arrived.

As I was helping some kids tie the laces of their skates, I noticed someone standing next to me.

“Can you give me a hand with my skates too?” she asked me.

I looked up... and there she was. Just like that, out of nowhere. I didn't have any problem recognizing her because she looked just the same. She was the same teenager from ten years ago. She hadn't changed a bit. She even had the woolen fingerless gloves on.

“River?...” I asked in disbelief, while I almost couldn’t breathe from the shock of recognizing her appearance. “Is it really you?”

“Yes, it’s me...”

She smiled.

“But how is it possible? Where have you been for so many years?”

She looked down, as if feeling a bit guilty.

“Well, I know it’s been a long time to you... But time is not the same for me. And it was for the better, you’ll understand. Look at you now: a real skate ring trainer...”

“Don’t change the subject. Why did you leave? Why did you disappear?”

The feeling of bewilderment was replaced by anger. I could feel the years of frustration going to my head. I wanted to ask her, to shout at her: *how could you leave me alone for so long??* But I swallowed my words. I was breathing fast, too angry to even speak.

“I can see that you’re upset”, she continued diplomatically. “Come on, I’ll show you”.

She skated ahead, crossing the rink. Looking at her as she was gaining distance, I wondered how we would deal with the difference between us. To me, ten years had gone by. To her, time seemed to just begin.

“I’m not a teenager anymore”, I said, and she replied, without turning around:

“That’s where you’re wrong”.

She paused at the end of the rink. I followed her to the glass window where the people who supervised the skating area stood watching.

“Look”, she said.

I glanced beyond the glass window. Instead of people, I saw a bed, in a room. It looked like a white hospital room. Someone was in there, tied to a breathing machine, unconscious. I froze, recognizing my own image from ten years ago.

“What is that? Another illusion?”

“Don’t let it scare you. And it’s not an illusion... it’s you. It’s the real you.”

I stared at her, not willing to understand. I felt very real as I was. But what she was trying to say was scaring me, even if I didn't know the meaning of it. I had a feeling I didn't want to know the meaning of it anyway. Something from her deep reassuring eyes gave me confidence. Something gentle and sweet, like a total acceptance, made me feel better. I took a breath.

“Tell me”, I said. “Tell me the truth.”

I was ready to hear it. At least it would come from her. It couldn't be that bad: she had been my focus for ten years. She had been my long time invisible companion. I trusted her.

“The truth is that you are over there... and you are right here too.”

“What, like in a parallel world?”

“Maybe. You can see it that way if you want. In that room, you're still a teenager. You're not a trainer and you're not ten years older. Do you remember your first day here? Only a few weeks have actually passed since your first visit to the skating rink. When you tripped, you hit your head and went into a coma. You've been in that state ever since.”

“But my life... it means I haven't actually lived these last ten years? How can that be? Was I just unconscious? I remember it like a movie: ten years of my life, becoming a trainer... do you mean it was just a dream?”

“You can take it both ways: it could be only a dream and it could be that you actually stepped into a parallel universe and became a trainer. But you are timeless, somehow. And so am I.”

I looked at her. She seemed seriously and deeply thoughtful.

“What about you? Who are you, River Flow? How do you appear and disappear – and then appear again?”

Her intense eyes glistened with a smile.

“I am like the flow of life, the endless river that runs free. You can come along with me, or you can remain in that room forever. It's your choice. But Will – you must find the will to decide... soon, before the breathing machine stops.”

“Is the machine going to do that? Is it going to shut down?”

“If you don’t wake up very soon, it will.”

“Do I have a choice between waking up and remaining here? Is that what you’re saying?”

I didn’t want to choose. I wanted to be with her.

“Will I find you in the other world if I wake up?”

She stared deeply into my eyes, as if she didn’t want to reveal the answer. There was a veil of mystery in her glance.

“I can’t guarantee you that I’ll meet you in the other time – or the other world, as you wish to consider it. But I can promise you I’ll never abandon you.”

“Are you some sort of an angel?”

She shrugged and looked away.

”People believe what they want to believe...”

I continued guessing:

“Are you a metaphor? Are you going to tell me that life is a skating rink and we mustn’t go too fast?”

“Life is like a skating rink, that’s true. You go round and round... but you never go back. You must take the moment as you find it – and live it as it comes. Because it never returns.”

“Are you the energy of life?”

“You shouldn’t wait any longer.”

“So how do I wake up? How do I go along with you?”

“You must decide”, she said, avoiding my questions. “You must really want it. If you really want it, you will wake up. And you will live.”

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I woke up and I saw light flooding the room. My eyes hurt at the intensity of it and my head hurt too. I couldn’t remember anything from my dream. I could only remember the skating rink. I couldn’t move too well, but I started to recover in the coming days. My colleagues at school said I had lost weight

during the time I was in a coma. It seemed to me I had missed so much of life and something was missing still.

One year after that, on a sunny day, as I was returning home on my bike, I saw a girl on roller skates. She was casually rolling by in the spring air filled with the scent of blossoming trees. Something from her appearance seemed to get my attention. She saw me looking at her, though I had sunglasses on. She felt it. And as I passed her by, while we were approaching a bridge, I heard her ask me something:

“Can you take me along with you across the bridge?”

I stopped the bike and looked back. She seemed to have a hard time advancing on the roller skates and the road was rough. I turned my bike and got near her, until she could grab the steel edge of it.

“Come on, I’ll get you across”, I said.

And I pedaled forward.

“Am I too heavy?” she asked me a bit concerned, because carrying her along was modifying my speed.

“No. You’re not heavy. Would you like me to go faster?”

And I pedaled faster.

“Wow, slow down!” she giggled, obviously enjoying the ride.

It was such a good feeling to be able to do that for a girl – just take her along the ride. The way she was relying on me and my strength to move ahead, the way she was asking me to slow down and meanwhile enjoying it, made it absolutely worth it. It was a moment I felt I was becoming more alive than I had recently been – or ever been, for that matter. It was a new experience for me that I never thought I would encounter just like that, on the road, on a random spring afternoon... When we were going across the bridge, where the asphalt was scattered with pebbles, and as I could feel her hanging on my bike, rolling along behind me, something about that realization made me so very happy. I felt very good and I knew it was what I had been missing: having a real girlfriend. Her presence like a miracle attached to my bike reminded me of something I had

long forgotten... It was such a beautiful spring day, with birds flying in the clear blue sky and fluffy grass by the side of the road...

We got beyond the bridge and I stopped the bike. I got off, while she let go of the metal bar. She attempted to take a step ahead, but the roller skates made her unstable. She staggered uneasily. I offered her my hand.

“Here... let me help you.”

She hesitated for a second, but then she took my hand without any doubts, without any questions. And in a flash, as her fingers touched mine, I realized it was something I had encountered before. The feeling of her hand holding mine, her acceptance and silent complicity, the certainty of it was beyond my memory: it was more than real. It was destined to happen. I didn't know how I was so sure that she had appeared on my way to bring me something I had been missing or never had... even though it was something I hadn't experienced and lived before, I knew it was something definitely meant to be mine to hold onto. I just knew the moment was absolutely special for me.

“What's your name?” I asked her attentively.

“I'm River”, she said and smiled innocently. “And you're Will, right?”

“How do you know?”

“I heard the boys talking about you. They said you were in a coma for many weeks. Is it true?”

I nodded.

“Yes, it's true.”

”You look okay now...”

”Yeah.”

I still felt as if I had been missing a lot from life, but I had an unexplained certainty that I was going to get it right eventually. Whatever I had lost... it would be mine one day.

“It's been a long time”, I said, staring ahead at the empty road stretching before us, in the sunlight. “Time goes by... and it doesn't come back. You can only go forward... by the way – where are you going?”



Her eyes seemed to have a mysterious veil when she answered, watching me observantly:

“I don’t know yet... I usually go with the flow... but we can go together for a while. Are you going that way?”

“Yes, that way.”

At that moment we were both looking in the same direction. There was only one road ahead, anyhow... but it seemed like we actually had a choice. And we were choosing it willingly.

“Well then... let’s get going.”

## 2

It’s easy for us to think we’re immortal. We look around, we see the ancient mountains, the eternal sky with planets, the entire universe that seems infinite and we think we are the same way... when we are born, we struggle to understand the world, then we think the world is at our feet, with as much time as we need to make our dreams come true and it’s a lot more difficult for us to imagine time is not endless - we’re not endless. We know we’re insignificant creatures compared to the immensity of the universe, but the notion doesn’t get too much attention in our head. We don’t want to believe our days are in some way unlimited. We like to see ourselves as invincible, eternal, powerful and timeless... And the notion of numbered minutes is absent from our minds... most of the time.

Only when we’ve got something to lose, that’s when the realization of time starts to take shape among our wishes.

The truth is, I honestly haven’t thought too often about my time – or time in general - being limited and running out. I wondered how long I would live, what I would do – but it didn’t matter to me very much. Not before I met River,

anyway. I used to believe I could do anything, be anything and have whatever time in the world was possible, to achieve whatever I could think of. I never thought of myself as having a life ticket, so to speak, of numbered days. I thought days were endless. But the idea of time not being on unlimited supply for me became clearer after I started spending time with River.

If everything could be as easy as a bike ride, life would not make us encounter so many questions and dilemmas. If keeping her in my life could have been as easy as attaching her to my bike, I would have been happy forever... But life is never that easy.

Having River in my life gave me unexpected happiness, incredible emotional comfort and unbelievable enthusiasm to live... finding her changed my perspective on everything... but it also gave me the frightening sense of having something immeasurably precious to lose: her love, if it was true. Her presence in my life meant so much that I didn't dare to think I was completely entitled to it. I wanted to consider her my dream come true – but I was also deeply lost in the abyss of wondering how long she might stick around. It wasn't that she didn't seem reliable: I just didn't see any reason why she would pick me to be with – and remain around for a longer time.

I knew I didn't have great advantages over the other boys: most were taller than me, possibly stronger, more appealing... and I had just come out of a coma... why would she want to be with me anyway? I knew she would soon find an interesting guy she could wish to build a better future with... I was aware that I might not represent her ideal partner. I knew I was not a men's health magazine cover. She could have found better than me any moment. That's what I was afraid would be the inevitable outcome of our short adventure together...

After our encounter on the road, we decided to meet again.

She sort of accepted to go out to the beach with me one weekend, which was almost like a date – and that meant I could consider her my girlfriend. In my mind, I already did. It made me really happy, so I threw away the thought of not being good enough for her... I ignored the fear of not deserving her for too long.

I erased the doubts from my mind. I decided to enjoy the present. And I wanted to believe. I wanted to hope it would last longer than a brief miracle.

I didn't know what was on her mind and she hadn't promised me anything. I suspected she just wanted to live the day and enjoy it as it was... even if her long term plans would not include me.

So we went to the beach.

We got there among other teenagers who were out to have fun on the sand. River threw her bag close to the group of many other bags and clothes. People were taking off their shirts to play volleyball; two dogs were running around, playing with kids. I didn't mind the crowd very much, because River had my full attention. However, she seemed a bit unaffected by the fresh joyful atmosphere, the salty drops of sprinkling ocean waves or the erratic shouts of the volleyball group. She seemed rather lost in thoughts. She took off her sandals and went to the edge of the water, with bare feet, to look beyond the horizon. I wondered what was troubling her. Something was going on behind those dark sunglasses and mysterious stare... Her black t-shirt was trembling in the breeze. When a wave splashed on her feet she leaned forward to roll up her jeans, right above the knees. I took off my sneakers and went to join her at the edge of the ocean.

"Whoa, it's ice cold!" I noticed as the water touched my toes.

I could feel the cold wave freezing my bones in unexpected dull pain, as it covered my ankles. I stepped back. River was still in the water.

"It's not that cold..." she said smiling at me from beyond the sunglasses.

"If you say so... but I think it's very cold."

"Let's go sit down then."

We went back to our spot on the sand. She was still lost in thoughts. She was absently staring to the distance.

"What?" I asked her.

"What, *what*?"

"What's wrong?"

"Nothing. You were right... It's very cold around here. I'm freezing."

It was an early spring morning and the breeze was turning our skin blue.

“Would you like my jacket?” I attempted to say.

I wanted to offer her something to help. I didn't like seeing her tremble in the black t-shirt and rolled up jeans.

“No, thanks. I'm fine.”

I couldn't ask her anything more. I kept wondering what she was thinking of. Why she wasn't enjoying the time we came to spend there. I wondered if she felt I wasn't the person she needed at that moment. We looked at the big dog running around as kids were throwing sticks for him to fetch. We stared at their game in silence. For a second, I turned my eyes to look at her and I caught her glancing at me, observantly and almost inquiringly. It was as if she wanted to say something that she couldn't say – as if she wished to read my mind. Then, she hid her head between her knees for a while, retreating in her thoughts, falling asleep or refusing to see the world. I stood there in silence, not knowing what to say, not wanting to disturb her mysterious mood. And the complicity of silence between us felt like something deeper and sweeter than words. We agreed to be silent. Our thoughts, undiscovered and unrevealed, were wandering together, rising above the beach in a dance, swaying like loose kites in the sky, together in silent mystery and solidarity. It was as if we were sharing so much more by not saying what each of us could not even begin to express. I almost felt her heart beating like an emotional wave; I could sense the sorrow of unspoken words engulfing both of us, the thrill of being so close together, without moving, without even touching. I wanted to reach out and wrap my arms around her; I longed to comfort her from the cold and the unexplained melancholy, as she was trembling in the black t-shirt. But I feared she wouldn't let me. She seemed too distantly lost in the mystery of her thoughts. So we both buried our toes in the sand and stood there in speechless acceptance – and unspoken regret.

After a while, she suddenly stood up and searched in her bag for something. It was a box of chocolates. She opened it, seeming more cheerful and she extended it to me:

“Here. Have a chocolate.”

I took one.

“Have two”, she insisted.

I took another and stuffed them in my mouth.

“What’s the occasion?” I asked her, chewing the melting chocolate. “Is your birthday today?”

“Yes... it is.”

“Wow! “

I was really surprised and I instantly thought I had missed the chance to do something especially for her.

“Happy birthday!”

“Thank you.”

I felt I had missed something important again.

“I should have brought you a present. Why didn’t you tell me?”

“When could I have told you? I don’t go around yelling at everyone, *hey, tomorrow is my birthday!*”

“I’m not everyone”, I said seriously.

I was a bit disappointed that I didn’t mean enough to her so that she could tell me such things about herself. It was true we hadn’t known each other for too long, but I felt I was less than I wished to be for her.

“Well, it doesn’t matter.”

She discarded it casually, sitting down on the sand again. “Don’t worry too much. And you? When is your birthday?”

“Why should I tell you? You didn’t tell me about yours.”

“Come on! I’ll get mad if you don’t tell me! I’ll never speak to you again!”

I stared at her and I started to laugh. Her childish threat was turning the conversation into a game. But I enjoyed it. Her eyes were glaring at me. I grinned.

“So, you really want to know when my birthday is?”

“Yes. Tell me.”

Her determined demand made me feel better. So, she actually cared...

“It’s every day, since I woke up from the coma.”

She smiled, but her eyes were still glaring. She threw sand at me, playfully.

“I’m never speaking to you again!”

“Great! Go ahead, keep silent!”

I laughed. I knew she didn’t mean it.

“Look”, I said, “we can go for a walk. See those dunes over there? I’d like to know what’s beyond them.”

I got up. She stared at me, from the ground.

“I don’t feel like it. You go and tell me what you find.”

I was confused. I didn’t expect her to just want to sit there, on the beach. I was very curious about what was behind the deserted dunes in the distance. I wanted to explore. But she seemed rather indifferent about it.

“Why aren’t you coming?”

She was still looking at me, with the same attitude, as if it didn’t matter, as if it wasn’t that important and something else was hovering above us... something huge and implacable. But she didn’t want to tell me what. She knew something I couldn’t guess. And it wasn’t good.

“It’s just sand”, she said after a while.

“Have you been there before?” I asked her anxiously.

I had begun to know for sure that River always chose to speak only a part of what she knew. The girl had many unrevealed secrets. Her mind was a mysteriously deep realm that I wanted so much to understand and get close to.

“I don’t need to go there”, she answered. “It’s just sand. But you can go and see if you want.”

As I was standing there hesitantly, she took something else out of her bag. She placed it on the sand, next to her – and in front of me. It was an hourglass. Somehow, it glowed strangely in the morning light. It was made of wood, but it looked like something transparent. The sand inside was of a silver nuance and it seemed very refined. It started slipping through, grain after grain rushing, sliding, gathering at the base, faster and faster... I stared at it, fascinated.

“This is time”, she said. “And time is always running out.”

The light around us changed. I had a feeling the entire beach and the dunes were made of silver sand... as if it was from the surface of the moon. At that moment, the volleyball players seemed to have disappeared from sight. We were alone, with the ocean... and the immensity of the glowing, irreversibly slipping sand. I didn't like what River was saying about time. I didn't want to think of time, while I was with her. I didn't want to imagine anything that would have an end, when I was with her. And yet, she had brought that object, to remind me.

It occurred to me that the hourglass was shaped like the infinity sign and yet it showed the irreversible race of life.

Suddenly, I realized what was strange about the hourglass, apart from its appearance: the sand gathering at the bottom was instantly vanishing. It was as if it was sliding into nowhere, filling the beach with its silver glow.

“What’s happening in there?” I asked her. “What kind of trick is that?”

“It’s not a trick. It’s an instrument that shows you how time goes by. The sand that slips away doesn’t return. That’s how it is with time: it goes on and on and you can’t stop it or make it return...”

“Why are you telling me this?”

“Because we don’t have forever, even if we want to.”

“Don’t say that.”

“It’s true. For example, if you want to see what’s beyond the dunes, you should go now. You might not get another chance at it. We might not come here again... Do you understand? Go right now, if you really want to do it.”

I looked to the distance, where the deserted dunes were hiding the unexplored territory that was alluring my mind. I wanted to find out... to see for myself what was beyond. River was holding the silver hourglass, while the refined sand was speeding through, into the base of empty nowhere. She was watching it absently.

“If the sand is slipping off so fast... and time is irreversibly limited... are you going to be here for long enough?” I asked her.

“You mean until you get back from your walk to the dunes?”

“No, I mean... until... how long are you going to be with me? How long are you planning to stay?”

She smiled.

“I’m not planning anything. It’s too soon – and I’m too young for that. I’m just enjoying myself right now. I’m here at the moment... that’s what you must know.”

I realized I would not get a better answer from her – and I couldn’t. She was in no position to promise me anything, or give guarantees. I wasn’t even sure I could consider her anything like my girlfriend, from only one date on the beach. I wondered if she wanted to be there with me indeed – or not.

I decided she wasn’t convincing enough to make me believe she wanted to be there. And I wanted to see what was in the distance.

“I’m going to the dunes”, I said. “If you want to wait for me, fine. But if you prefer to leave, you can just go. Just say good bye and go.”

I said those words a bit upset at the idea that she didn’t care enough to tell me she would remain in my life – or at least to say she wanted to. I chose to give her freedom to decide what she really wanted.

And I turned to leave.

I walked for half an hour. The dunes were harder to reach than they had actually seemed. As I kept advancing, I realized the distance was far greater than I had initially estimated. I looked back from time to time, only to see the long beach, stretching away like a lonely desert washed by relentless waves. The breeze was throwing sand in my eyes and I was certain River had already left. I was most definitely certain that she wasn’t there anymore. I knew she wouldn’t wait for me to get back – maybe she would just disappear like the hourglass silver sand, irreversibly slipping away...

I climbed the first dune, eventually. Beyond it, there was another one: high, with soft sand where my feet would sink down to my knees with each step. It was difficult to climb. It would have been easier to swim through it. After climbing the second dune, I found another... and then another. The area was beginning to look like a desert indeed. I could hardly see the ocean anymore,



behind me, beyond the rim of dunes. I couldn't hear the breeze in that place and the sand seemed more and more overwhelming. After a while, I saw the end of it. *So, the sand isn't endless*, I thought to myself. Looking ahead, I noticed a pine forest, going to the horizon. I paused on the last dune of sand and sat there for a while.

When I wanted to get up and get back, the sand from the dunes started to slip away. It was sliding down into the ocean and taking me with it. I could feel something like glass beneath the silver tide of sand slipping downhill. I looked up to the sky and it seemed to be confined in a vault of glass too. I tried to grab onto something, as I was slipping down, but I couldn't reach anything. Time – or silver sand was dragging me away into the ocean. The steep slope made me think of the hourglass. In a second of panic, as I was trying to reason with the situation, it occurred to me that I could have been trapped in a huge hourglass and the entire beach was just the sand of time, running away into nowhere, into emptiness... into the water. Instead of falling in the waves, when I got to the bottom of the hill, I slid on slippery glass and found myself rolling on the ice of the skating rink.

The beach had disappeared. The ocean had disappeared too. I was grabbing onto something: the wooden ledge of the skating area. I felt dizzy and looked around. There were a few kids sliding on ice. There were a few people watching from the sides, probably their parents. And I was standing on the blue heavy skates that I knew so well...

I noticed River Flow at a distance, leaning on the ledge too. I skated towards her immediately. She was just standing there, with the dark sunglasses on. She wasn't moving, just waiting, immobile and expressionless. But when I got closer, I noticed tears sliding down her face.

“River... are you crying?”

I reached out my hand and took off her dark sunglasses. She let me do it without protesting. She turned her eyes to me, clear deep windows of her soul – and for the first time, she wasn't hiding anything. Big tears kept rolling down

her cheeks. I touched her face and my fingers got wet. She took a step back, looking away.

“No!”, I said. “Why??”

She looked down and didn't answer. At our feet, waves of deep blue water were splashing and foaming beneath the ice of the skating rink. I wondered if the ocean was raging under the ice, waiting to get out and drown us, drown everything away. I looked at River. At that moment, I knew I loved her more than I had thought possible.

She just watched the waves beneath the ice and didn't say anything.

Meanwhile, some kid grabbed my jeans.

“Sir, can you please return to our training schedule?”

I stared at the kid, bewildered. *What training schedule?*

I looked back at River. She had a resigned attitude. Something about her sorrow had been replaced by a deeper understanding of the implacable things that we could not decide about.

I shook my head. I realized I was wearing a trainer's blue coat. I remembered the ten years of becoming a trainer... it was a part of my life. It was something that belonged to me. And yet it separated me from her irrevocably – and I couldn't do anything about it. I recalled ten years without her, lost in a blink of an eye...

I stared at River.

“Please tell me this is just a dream and I will wake up to be a teenager again... Please tell me that ten years aren't already gone!”

“You look good in blue”, River replied with a melancholic voice, wiping the tears away from her face and trying to smile at me, as if she wanted to help me confront the truth of where I was. “Better go take care of those kids, they're waiting for you...”

And she started towards the exit of the skating rink. I didn't want to let her disappear like that – not again... not after everything that had happened. Watching her go was tearing my soul apart. The pain was too much to bear. I couldn't breathe. I felt I would soon start crying too, but I clenched my teeth.

The tension was stifling. I couldn't go on without her. Life would be just bleak and empty in her absence, like those ten years of waiting to find a lost illusion.

“Where are you going now? Where can I find you?” I asked after her, feeling a desperate need to get some answers. “Can't we just go back to the other parallel world? Is there a way we can return to the other time, the other reality?”

I kept speaking, but she didn't answer.

She didn't turn around and I felt I couldn't follow her – my feet seemed stuck to the cold ice, encased in the heavy skates like in cement. I just stood there and watched her go. It was killing me, but I couldn't move.

Then I gathered my strength and skated in anger towards the glass window, knocking my fists on it.

“Let me out! This is just an hourglass, let me out of here! It's not fair! I want to go back!”

I was determined to smash the glass window, so I took some distance, then rushed into it in full speed, but when I slammed into the wall I knocked my head on the screen and blacked out. As I was laying down on the cold surface and the image was slowly blurring, fading away, I could see grains of silver sand slipping by on ice, disappearing into the depth of the skating rink, like a game of marbles, scattered by a child on the floor.

When I opened my eyelids, I could hear the sound of the breathing machine, like a roaring buzz in the background. Light flooded my eyes. I thought I saw the white ceiling of a room, but the image quickly turned into a plastic and aluminum roof. After a few seconds I realized I was actually on a bus, sitting close to the front side. The roaring sound wasn't a breathing machine, it was the bus engine.

“Good morning!” I heard a friendly voice.

I turned around. River was smiling at me, with her deep mysterious eyes glistening in the joyful morning light. She was seated behind me and was listening to something on a pair of big blue headphones that matched her light blue jeans jacket. I wondered if she was wearing blue just to harmonize her presence with mine... I was so happy to see her that I didn't really care anymore where we were.

I looked around: the bus was full of teenagers. It looked like a school trip. I was glad to realize I was one of them again, even if the most important thing about it was not the fact that I was a part of a group, but having my life ahead of me and being equal to River... it meant having a chance with her. It meant everything.

The road ahead seemed endless. The sun was so bright, it was blinding. I tried to look out the window and I protected my eyes with the palm of my hand.

“Here”, I heard River say. “Take my sunglasses”.

She offered me her sunglasses, which was a generous gesture that meant getting closer to her by something that belonged to her directly - and I put them on without a second thought. Suddenly, I felt so much better, not only because of the shades, but because I was sharing something personal with her - and because the view had changed completely, everywhere around... I could see galaxies and comets flying by the side of the road, stars and the deep space with

so many colors, from pink to purple, steel and indigo, while the bus was rolling on toward some aurora borealis curtain that was magically swaying in the distance.

“This is amazing!” I smiled enchanted.

I couldn’t get enough of it. She acknowledged it with a hidden delight.

“You like my sunglasses.”

“Now I know why you’re always wearing these”, I told her.

“You look great with them. Perfect on you”, she said and she came to sit next to me.

It was a blissful moment. I had that feeling again, that life would be eternal... that we were invincible like the galaxies around us... and love was infinite... I felt its energy rising between us like invisible glue, an overwhelming wave that made the morning light seem brighter than it had ever been. We were alive... really alive.

River took off her headphones and placed them on my head.

“I want you to listen to something. It’s my favorite song.”

I listened and I liked it a lot. I realized we had similar tastes and we both liked to see the depth of everything. I looked at her. She was smiling, watching me observantly, but somehow more than content... I wondered if she was just as happy as I felt.

“You gave me your sunglasses... you gave me your headphones... what’s next?”

“Don’t get the wrong idea,” she protested playfully. “I only borrowed them to you.”

“Yeah, but they’re mine now. I can see what you see and I can hear what you’re listening to... you can’t take that away.”

“That’s right...”

I glanced ahead, at the magical horizon with stars and colors and aurora borealis.

“So tell me... did I wake up or not? Am I ten years older or not?”

“Why does it matter? It might be true both ways... but you don’t have to worry about it now. You should stop trying to make sense of it.”

“You’re right... I just wanted to understand. So where are we going now?”

“Don’t you know?”

“I know we’re on the road...”

“That’s the main idea.”

I decided to leave it at that. Being with her was enough. I was happy I hadn’t lost her. Anything else was irrelevant.

We started to play a game. We gave meanings to each color. The more meanings one of us could come up with, it made that one a winner.

“It’s your turn to pick a color.” I told her.

“White.”

“Wings, angels, innocence.”

She smiled, watching me with that deep stare. Something warmer was hidden in her eyes, increasing each time she glanced at me. Finally, she spoke.

“Snow, winter, fantastic fairy tales...”

“It’s fifty-fifty. Pick another color.”

“No, you pick one.”

“No, it’s still your turn... we didn’t decide the last time.”

“Ah, you’re so stubborn...”

“And so are you.”

“I know. Ok, red.”

“Love, passion, roses...”

“I wanted to say roses!” she protested. “Wait, I know better: fire, intensity, life...”

“Still a tie. Pick another.”

“Black.”

“Mystery, depth, power.”

“Unknown, night, wild.”

“Black is wild?...”

“Yes, very wild... why not? Black has something absolutely wild and untamed about it... Want another word for it? Dangerous. Intriguing. Attractive. I got you with it!”

“No, you didn’t. That’s part of the mysterious. You can’t say what I already said. That was my line... Pick another color.”

“No, it’s your turn this time. I mean it.”

“Ok, fine... Blue.”

“That’s because you like blue.”

“Yes. Blue is the sky. Blue is infinity.”

“It’s the ocean too. The endless dreams... the morning light and the moonlight. An eternal sapphire on a ring...”

I looked at her, as she talked. She was looking at me. We seemed to have spoken at a depth that words could not reach, describe or encounter... something only the eyes could reveal: the abyss and mystery of the soul.

“What?” she said after a while of staring at each other in silence.

“Did you just mention a ring?”

She didn’t avert her eyes. She kept staring at me. I kept watching her.

“I might have said it. I think I win now. I enumerated more meanings than you.”

“But did you say the word *ring*?”

“Why are you asking?”

“Like a skating *rink* or like a *ring* – ring?”

“I guess like a *ring* – ring. I said a sapphire on a ring. But now that you remind me of the *skating rink*... how about the blue skates too? That makes four points for me. I definitely win now!”

She grinned joyfully. I sighed.

“Ok, you win...”

“What shall we play next?”

She was eager to continue. I was glad to see her having a good time, and that was more than enough. Besides, I couldn’t have been happier myself.

“You seem to be really enjoying it.”

“Yeah, I am. I’m getting good at this!” she said with a satisfied tone.

“That’s only because I let you.”

“You wish! Believe what you want, but I still won.”

“In your view, you won before we even started... Right?”

“Right.”

She laughed. I was watching her, still amazed at the flow of stars, comets and galaxies running around her like a vision of the night sky... and beyond the windows of the bus the deep space was expanding endlessly.

“What do we play now?”

“Truth or dare”, I said, watching her seriously.

I wanted to get some answers. I was determined I would. And she would tell me.

She sensed by my attitude I intended to get somewhere with it. But she accepted the risk.

“Ok, truth or dare. I go first because I won the last time.”

“Go ahead.”

She pondered for a while. Her deep mysterious eyes had that veil again, that I knew so well – when she was thinking deeply about something she wouldn’t reveal.

“Truth... you answer this question: why did you leave me the other day at the beach? Dare – you give me back my headphones.”

“That’s easy. I like these headphones, I’m keeping them. They’re very blue anyway... I pick truth: I left you because you weren’t sure you wanted me to stay and you didn’t want to come along with me.”

“That’s not true. I wanted you to remain and I couldn’t go there with you. You saw very well why.”

I shrugged.

“Whatever... If you say so... Let’s just pretend it was a misunderstanding. I really want you to remain too.”

We looked pensively ahead, at the aurora borealis. Then I remembered I wanted some answers from her.



“My turn now”, I said.

She shifted her position to face me and looked attentively in my eyes.

“Well?”

“Well... truth: do you love me or not? And you must also tell me the truth about these two parallel worlds – or different timelines. You tell me what it means and where I am – and how – and why. Either that, or... dare: you find the audacity to kiss me and be mine forever.”

She smiled.

“You’re not asking for much, are you...”

I smiled too.

“That’s how I want it. Take it or leave it. Yes or no.”

She was thinking deeply and her eyes were hard to read.

I repeated my request:

“Truth or dare. Pick one already, you’re taking too long.”

She raised her eyes to look at me. I could see she was undecided about it. She was afraid to choose. At that moment, the bus stopped.

I gave her back the headphones and the sunglasses and we got off. Somehow, the game was over... for the moment.

We were in the middle of nowhere – and yet we were at the entrance of a skating rink.

“A skating rink again!” I exclaimed, surprised.

“It’s a nice place...”

“It might be, but it’s also very confusing.”

And I looked at her.

“Don’t forget that you owe me one – the truth or dare choice. You owe me an answer to it.”

The galaxies and comets were gone, since I had taken off the sunglasses, but the skating rink was surrounded by mist and it had no ceiling. It was an open skating rink, unlike the one where we had been before. And it seemed to float on clouds – like a castle in the sky.

“This is unreal...” I said to myself.

River went ahead to put on her skates. We ignored the group and decided to have a good time there, since the bus had brought us in that place above the clouds. I was getting used to things being strangely unpredictable. While I was adjusting my skates, I saw River go round the arena, making smooth tracks on the bright ice reflecting the morning sunlight, as her blue jacket was shining with steel buttons. She was wearing blue leggings too and she had tied her hair up with a blue pin. As she was going round and round, in that skating rink above the clouds, I had the feeling I was watching a precious jewel display its greatness in a simple yet irreplaceable beauty and value. She even seemed to have invisible wings, as if she was flying on ice, elegantly and innocently unaware of her own brightness and uniqueness. I remembered her words, *an eternal sapphire on a ring* and an idea suddenly came to my mind: a realization of something more meaningful than I had thought of before. She was my sapphire and the ring was the ice skating rink of life... I felt again that frightening fear of ever losing her. I was afraid to take my eyes off her. I needed her to be with me forever... even if she was just an angel skating above the clouds... I realized I was daydreaming when she stopped in front of me, breathing faster from the joy of the ride.

“Aren’t you coming?”

I looked at her, unable to wake up from that vision.

“Listen”, she continued, “you must come along... you can’t just sit here by yourself. Come with me. Please. Come in the arena.”

I didn’t react to what she was saying. I was worried everything would disappear in a flash, any second. It was too ethereal, too fragile – too surreal to last for long.

“I’ll explain something to you”, she went on, while I kept staring in her eyes helplessly. “I need you to remember that you’re a trainer. I need you to be that for me. I want you to teach me how to skate very well... That’s what I came here for. I gave you back your teenage dreams, wishes and memories because it’s what you wanted and what you were missing. But now I need you to do this for me, and it’s very important. When we get on the ice, I’ll see you as my

trainer and you'll guide me to become better at skating. Do you agree with it? Do we have a deal?"

I stared at her, blankly.

"Am I just a trainer to you?"

"No, you didn't understand. You asked for the truth, here is the truth: you can be sure I love you and I'm sorry if I ever gave you reasons to doubt that. I didn't want to give off that impression. I'm here if you need me, but in return I need something else from you: to teach me how to skate the best way that I am capable of. If you're my trainer, you'll mean so much more to me. I need you to be that. Are you ready for it? Are you coming now?"

I wished I could believe her that she loved me. I thought about the ten years gone by for nothing – at least how I considered them, in the absence of love. If what she was saying was true, it meant I was supposed to become a trainer only to help her with skating. My mission had been just that: and she was able to give me something back in exchange for the lost time. At least I had some reason for it. I could consider everything a bonus. My time had actually been extended by the presence of interlaced realities. It might make things right, I thought. Maybe I had hit my head that day and River was a compensation for it. Maybe ten years had passed by indeed and I had gained something else in the meantime. If she said she loved me, that might just be enough, I thought.

However, I hesitated before I could believe it completely. The experience of jumping from one timeline to another, from one world to another wasn't very clarifying about the truth of the entire situation.

"So am I alive right now or am I in a coma and dreaming about this? Did ten years pass by or didn't they? Are we here or am I there?"

She sighed.

"There you go again... Look at us: we are very much alive right now. If ten years passed by or not, it doesn't matter anymore at this very moment. If you're still on the breathing machine or not... it doesn't matter either way... So just come in the rink and let's skate. Let's get this over with. Okay?"

I could see in the distance an unclear contour of a breathing machine, moving steadily, yet fading into the sky, a dissipating steam like an illusion.

“And what happens after I teach you how to skate better? What then? Are you going to leave afterwards? Am I going to just stop breathing and die?”

“I don’t know. It’s too soon to know what will be later on.”

I looked at her, wondering what she was – why she had been sent to me... because it seemed that way. She wasn’t a simple girl and it wasn’t just a dream. There was something more to it.

“Are you the angel of life or the angel of death?”

She didn’t appear surprised by the question.

“It’s not something I get to decide about”, she answered, looking away.

At that moment, a flight of birds took off and went up to the clear blue sky, white pigeons fluttering their soft feathers in a graceful dance with the heights... We watched them rise freely and get lost into the infinity of the eternal blue above the skating rink. I wondered if we were like that: white pigeons waiting to take off and fly away one day...

I watched River attentively. She was waiting peacefully, with a serene attitude of accepting the moment as it was... accepting me as I was... and accepting life as it would come.

I decided to let go of everything else that was on my mind.

I was there and she was there – and the skating rink was there just for us.

Even if it was just an illusion. It was *my* illusion. And I had a right to it.

“Okay”, I said. “Let’s do this.”

And we started skating together.

\*

You’ll never know if this story has a happy ending or not... because I don’t know it myself right now, so the ending will not be revealed. It doesn’t even matter anyway...

One thing is certain: we don't know what this life is and how long it lasts. We don't know if it's an illusion or a dream. Nobody knows it for sure, or why we are in the skating rink. We don't even know the outcome of everything that happens to us. I don't know the answers either, so I won't tell you. I'm telling you something else instead.

I only know that while we are here, we'd better be skating.

If you need some advice about it, here it is:

*First, it's very important to have courage.* Don't be afraid of doing anything brave. Go ahead and make a step in the skating rink. Advance, take initiative for whatever it is you want to achieve. If you don't have courage to initiate action, you don't have anything.

*Second, you must really be focused on what you want to do.* You must be persistent and determined. You must decide and select your wish, then stick to it. Be focused until you see it come true.

*Third: believe.* You need to let go sometimes and just believe in something. Believe in the good of the outcome. Believe it is possible. Believe in your own future.

*And last but not least: keep moving. It's how life goes on.*